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## Sermon from the Epistle-Lesson for the Third Sunday in Lent.

"Christ an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor" — these words stamp the lesson before us a proper Lenten text. Similar language is found in Genesis. Noah and his family are gathered around the first altar which the hands of believers have reared on the sorely chastised earth. As the fragrance of the patriarch's bountiful sacrifice rises heavenward, and the souls of the worshipers rise with it to the merciful God who has saved them out of the universal destruction, "the Lord," so Moses relates, "smelled a sweet savor." Noah's offering found favor with God. Why? "By faith Noah," etc., Hebr. 11, 7. Noah was recognized by God not for what he was, but for what he believed. Not the performance of the sacrifice, but the faith which prompted the performance, pleased the Lord.

Noah lived in a wicked age. The spirit of worldliness, ever since the days of Cain, was making great inroads upon the Church. Noah lived to see the last wall of division between the Church and the world go down. The children of God were become quite worldly. Banquets and merry gatherings, marriages carnally conceived and carnally executed, were the order of the day also among the godly race. No doubt, there was still a pretense of worship, altars were smoking here and there, but the sacrifices stank in the nostrils of Jehovah; for He who alone could make these significant acts of homage acceptable to the Holy One had been forgotten by this doomed generation. A solitary figure, Noah and the eight members of his household stood in the midst of universal spiritual and moral rotteness. His voice was raised in solemn protest and warning, and was drowned in howls of derision. His heart was filled with loathing at what he saw and heard. He remembered that the curse of God had fallen on this wanton, profligate crowd, and that there was no hope for them except in the sacrifice with which God had promised to atone for their guilt and to renew their hearts. His desires were all towards the bruised Woman's Seed. In Christ he offered to God his humble sacrifices. To the great sacrifice of the

Lamb of God he looked with still keener interest after he had passed through the awful visitation of the flood. Noah's faith, then, was the goodly frankincense which mingled its hidden fragrance with the material odors of his sacrifice, and attracted the pleased attention of the Lord, and brought him a generous blessing.

Father Noah is a type of the Christian Church. The world today is the same reeking, filthy, prurient set which it ever was. It heeds not the fearful catastrophes with which the wrath of the Almighty overwhelms it. For the salvation of His own God has prepared an ark, 1 Pet. 3, 20. 21. With Noah, the believers who have escaped from the corruption of the world still offer to God sweet-smelling sacrifices and receive blessings in return. But what makes their sacrifices acceptable to God is the fact that the Redeemer's merit is mingled with them, and the Redeemer's example prompts and regulates them, gives them content and form. Accordingly, we direct our attention, with reverence, to

### THE SWEET-SMELLING SACRIFICE OF CHRIST,

and consider

1. *What it has accomplished for us;*
2. *What it effects in us.*

#### 1.

Paul refers to the death of Christ when he says: v. 2. In order to understand the crucifixion we must view it as "an offering and a sacrifice to God." We meet with these words, "sacrifice" and "offering," in all parts of Scripture. The first recorded act of worship after the expulsion of our parents from paradise was a sacrifice. We do not find that God had demanded this sacrifice of Cain and Abel. True, Adam and Eve had taught their sons this act of devotion, but the question still remains: What impressed them with the duty of offering sacrifices? That they regarded themselves as under obligation to God for His mercies, that they wished to express their dependence upon Him, that gratitude prompted them to make returns to God for His bounty, is correct. But was that all? Back of these sacrifices there lies a deeper meaning, especially when we think of the bloody sacrifices. It seems cruel to slay so many useful animals, to fairly drench the sanctuary with blood; yea, it seems strange that the Author of life should find pleasure in the taking of life. — Mark! Ever since the fall man's conscience has convicted him that the words spoken by God Gen. 2, 17 and 3, 19 were no idle threat. These words argued man's guilt and proved to him that he had forfeited his life. If God chose to execute the sentence already pronounced, man could not complain. Now, the sacrifice was substituted for the sinner offering it. The sinner, as it were, died by proxy. — But what virtue is there in the offering of a heifer? If sin had consisted in theft, or any other act of external violence, it might have been atoned, as to its outward effects, by a restoration of the spoiled good;



but sin was a moral fault. It was the severance of the tie that bound man to God. The ruptured tie could not be repaired except by God Himself, and it required an atonement by one with whom God could deal without offense to His own holiness. Such a person earth did not count among her citizens, but in heaven One was found. God gave His own Son, and His Son gave Himself as an offering for the sins of the world. The atoning sacrifice of Christ was published immediately after the fall. Adam and his children were taught by God to look for One who should come in the fullness of time, to adopt their guilt and to repair their loss, to live the life which Adam should have lived, and to go into the grave and hell as the sinner's substitute, thus effecting the sinner's deliverance by proxy. To the sacrifice of this person the bloody offerings recounted in the Old Testament point. They are types and shadows of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. — Paul plainly exhibits Christ as the sinner's representative when he says: "He hath given Himself for us." "For us," that means in our stead. The passion of Christ is the execution of the sentence pronounced upon Adam and his race. The cross on which He died is the grandest altar ever reared on this cursed earth, and He who hangs upon it is the most precious offering ever placed before the offended God. In His mighty passion the Son of God has yielded Himself up to the Judge of all the earth in order to procure a pardon for the whole world. What the slaying of all brute life in creation could not have brought about, what the destruction of the whole human race could not have accomplished, that has been gained by the free and willing sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God. All other offerings were tainted with sin: His alone is pure and immaculate. The sacrifice of Christ was a sweet-smelling savor to God; He has yielded His pardon to mankind on account of this offering. He demands that those who would honor Him must offer to Him the sacrifice of His Son, *i. e.*, they must lay hold by faith of the crucified Lord and say to God: "O Lord, I detest myself, and I am sure that all my own offerings would be filthy rags and an abomination in Thy sight. But I offer to Thee Thine own Son slain in my place. This offering I ask Thee to accept as mine, as Thou hast taught me to do." Thus the crucified Christ becomes our daily Advocate with God, and His offering is our only comfort in the sorrow which sin brings upon us.

## 2.

It is at the close of an entreaty to deeds of love and at the beginning of a similar entreaty to chaste living that the apostle reminds us of the Redeemer's sacrifice, vv. 1. 2. The cross of Christ says to the sinner, not only: Thy sins are canceled! but also: Sin no more! That is the meaning why the apostle, after exhibiting the sacrifice of the Lord, continues: vv. 3. 4. Here he speaks of the

works of Christians. He wants them to remove sin so effectually that they shall not even be named among them. And what sins they are! Immorality in its grossest and finest forms; not only such as even shock a heathen, but also such as the fashion of the day has glossed over. He urges upon them not only the omission of unclean acts, but also the avoidance of all things that lead to uncleanness.

The redeemed have not been delivered from the presence and besettings of sin, but the sacrifice which was offered for them exerts also this power that it arms them against it. Paul says: Rom. 12, 1. In denying himself the gratification of his desires, in fighting the temptation to wrongdoing, in conquering his rebellious flesh, the Christian performs an act which much resembles the action of the priests of old when they grabbed the victim to be offered on the altar by the throat, and stabbed, and killed, and burned it. The cross of Christ fills the Christian with a holy horror of sin, for it shows what a hideous, hellish thing sin is. Rather than consent to sin the Christian offers up his affections which are in this earth; he is cruel to his flesh, he binds his lusts with strong cords, gags, starves, beats, bruises, and runs the old Adam in him out of breath by forcing himself to observe strictest purity. For Christ's sake and by the power of His grace he engages in this mortification of the flesh.

The unchaste generation before the flood ridiculed pious Noah; the adulterous generation of Christ mocked the holy Nazarene up to the hour of His death. The world has not changed its mind on these things since. It has nothing but scorn for the chaste conversation of the followers of Christ. And the opinion of the world has still some weight with weak Christians. They do say: "Our church and minister take a dark view of the most innocent matters. They want us to be real saints." The latter is true, but it is God who wants His Christians to be saints. When Paul warns against jesting, he says it "does not become saints." We are saints, hence we ought to act like saints.

Great issues hang on the duty which the apostle has inculcated; for he proceeds: vv. 5—8. From the strong language of the apostle and the terrible consequences he points out we can surmise what view he would take of certain things which pass as innocent amusements in many churches of our day. We need to have our eyes peeled in regard to these things. It is absurd, beloved, to imagine that Satan, in order to lead Christians astray, would induce them to commit downright crimes, such as even a callous worldling loathes. The devil is not such a fool; the cunning and crafty rogue knows that his only chance for success with the Christian lies in his ability artfully to conceal his infernal aims. He must dilute his poison and honey his hellish drugs if he would have the Christian take them. The Christian Church would not have the thousandth part of her trouble with his wiles if he would always show himself the mali-



cious spirit he is. As it is, the Church must guard against his covered attacks, and cry out against his sinister moves. These things which do not become saints are not innocent affairs, but they are damnable practices. That is what our text says.

Christian parents, pastors, teachers, elders, and believers in general should not be dismayed at the opinion of the immoral world, and should not on that account flinch from denouncing outright, with apostolic zeal, the immoral practices of a corrupt age. For the sacrifice of Jesus old and young should unite in fighting the devil of lewdness. Let us not be deceived with vain words; much that is passing as inoffensive nowadays is not so. Let us not sacrifice our health, good conscience, and peace of mind to the flesh, but rather let us sacrifice the flesh to our physical, spiritual, moral health and well-being. May the Word of Christ and His sweet-smelling sacrifice prove in us a divine power to induce us to walk in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Amen.

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## Sermon on the Gospel-Lesson for Sunday Laetare.

JOHN 6, 1—15.

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Our Gospel-lesson tells us of a miracle which our Savior performed in a wilderness. It was not the first of His miracles. The people had witnessed others before, yea, they wanted to see more, and for that reason not less than about five thousand men, and perhaps as many women and children, followed Him into a wilderness to which He had gone for a short rest. This wilderness was on the east side of the "Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias." Jesus, with His disciples, crossed over the sea in a boat, and the multitude walked around the sea in order to get to Him.

Jesus had gone for a little rest, but the people would not give Him the much-needed rest. When they had come to Him, He first preached the Word unto them, and then He healed their sick. Before they were aware of it, the sun was setting, and they had brought no food. What did Jesus do? "He saith unto Philip . . . Himself alone." The people were not mistaken. Jesus was in deed and truth "that prophet that should come into the world," *i. e.*, the promised Messiah. God had fulfilled His promise. The Son of God, the Messiah, had been sent. But, alas! these people had no right conception of His Messiahship. For they wanted to crown Him as their king, *i. e.*, they wished to have Him as their *worldly* ruler or king. Indeed, a king that would not only heal their sicknesses, not only take away their various troubles, but would also feed them, would be a king worth having! That Jesus was a *spiritual* king, the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil, did not concern these people very much. They were not looking nor wishing for such a king. They only

wanted to be free from bodily ailings, and have plenty of bread and fish. Yea, it is a sad fact, but nevertheless true, that this multitude had no right regard for the Savior's *person, office, and work*, and therefore the Savior "departed again into a mountain, Himself alone."

And to this very day multitudes have no right conception of the person, office, and work of Jesus Christ, our one and only Savior. In accordance with our Gospel-lesson, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we shall now answer the question:

### WHAT MANNER OF A SAVIOR IS JESUS CHRIST?

1. *Not such a one as most people WANT*, but
2. *Such a one as all people NEED.*

#### 1.

This earth is a "vale of tears." It was not such before the fall of man. Before the fall of man the earth was a paradise. By sin paradise was transformed into a vale of tears. Although not all people believe that there once was a paradise, they nevertheless all admit that this earth of ours now is a vale of tears. All people must suffer more or less in body and soul. Here on this earth there are sicknesses, trials, tribulations, bereavements, pains, and, last of all, temporal death. Even those who deny that all ailings of body and soul are the consequences and wages of sin nevertheless would like to be free from them even in this world. "How grand it would be," people often say, "if this earth could be turned into a veritable heaven!" A man that could and would change this earth into a temporal heaven, a man that would banish all manner of bodily and spiritual ailing from this earth, would be *the* man for the vast multitude. Such a savior would be welcomed.

This is very evident from our Gospel. Jesus had performed an undeniably great miracle, when He fed those five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two fish. No wonder that the multitude cried out: "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world!" But why did they not come to this conclusion through the other miracles which Jesus performed? Matthew expressly says that the Lord had performed many other miracles before their eyes on that very day; that He had healed many of all kinds of diseases and had cast out evil spirits of many a one. Yea, they had seen many of Jesus' miracles before this day. They had often heard Him say to those whom He had healed: "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee"—"Thy faith hath healed thee." And yet, not until this day did they come to the conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth in deed and in truth must be that great Prophet, *i. e.*, the promised Messiah. Only when Jesus had filled their hands with bread and fish in the wilderness, when He had given them plenty to eat, then this people cried out: That must be "that prophet that should come into he world." Yea, more! They even make



preparations to take Him by force, and make Him their king. "Come! Everybody come!" they perhaps shouted to one another. "Come! Here is the savior we need! Here is a man that will be a better king than Herod is! Here is a king with the full dinner pail! Down with Herod! Down with Caesar! Here is a king that is able to feed us, our wives, and our children, while we can be at leisure, sleep, eat, drink, and make merry! Come! Make haste! Come, before He escapes!" But alas! they were mistaken. Jesus was not such a king as they wanted. For we read in the Gospel-lesson: "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain, Himself alone."

This multitude had a very erroneous and false conception of the person, office, and work of the Messiah. They were not seeking a savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil, *i. e.*, not a spiritual king, but, rather, a worldly king that would throw off the yoke of Caesar, and restore to the Jews the power and splendor they had during the reign of David and Solomon, and who would give them the "good things of this world." They were bent on a king, a savior, who would give them worldly fame and prosperity. They did not want a spiritual king, *i. e.*, the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. That such was the case the Savior told them the following day when they found Him in Capernaum. They asked Him: "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" Jesus answered them and said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled," v. 26.

So it is with many people to this very day, and so it always will be with the multitude. "Henry Martyn, the missionary, a hundred years ago, found that the thronging crowds of poor Hindoos that gathered around him every week came more for the bread he was in the habit of distributing among them than for the Gospel Bread of Life. And so it is with many still. They profess religion, join the church, or take part with church people, more for the credit, social standing, or business advantage it may be to them than for any honest spiritual profit. What they look at is the worldly gain. They have a relish for the loaves and fish, and it is this that controls their movements. They are eager enough to have Christ, if He will prosper their earthly lives, fill their barns and purses, and crown them with temporal good and honor. But when the soul is to be subjugated to righteousness and truth, self-denial and the cross endured, the ardor fails, and the showy zeal expires. When there is to be a feeding of the flesh and its lusts and appetites, or food and money to be given away, there is stir and eagerness enough; but when only spiritual good is to be obtained, and only the Bread of Life is offered, the multitudes turn away, and the altar of God is neglected and forsaken." (Seiss, *B. L.*, p. 324.) Such, of course,

are disappointed in Christ. He is not a savior to their fancy and liking. They are after a dispenser of bread, and not after the Savior from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Their most important question is not: "What must I do to be saved?" How may I receive forgiveness of my sins?—but rather: Where can I get the loaves and fish? Where can I get the most of this world's good, money, fame, honor, and pleasure?

But, my friends, though Jesus is not such a savior as most people would have, He nevertheless is the one and only Savior that all people are in need of having, yea, must have, if they are to be eternally saved.

## 2.

All people in this world are in need of a Savior such as Jesus is. He alone is able to supply them with what they need for their body and soul.

Christ Jesus has not promised to any one earthly riches, wealth, fame, honor, or pleasures. But He has promised what we really need for the sustenance of our body: food and raiment. If anyone is industrious and economical and if he trusts in the Savior, and poverty comes upon him, *i. e.*, if he has need of the necessities of life which Jesus has promised to give, let him go to Jesus in prayer; Jesus will help him. Jesus will rather perform a great miracle than not keep His promise concerning food and raiment. This is evident from our Gospel. The multitude was in need of food. They had made a long journey in order to come to Him. They had walked about fifteen miles. The day was well-nigh spent. Night was at hand. They were in a wilderness, desert, and had no opportunities to purchase food. If they had been sent away without food, they might have perished on their way. Here was need of the Savior's help. And He did help. And as there was no other way of helping them, the dear Savior performed a great miracle. Jesus here manifested Himself as a savior from bodily need. He did not give these people riches, wealth, plenty of money,—for they were not in need of these things,—but He gave them the necessities of life: bread, and even fish. Therefore, most beloved friend, if you are in need of the necessities of life, go to Jesus. Jesus will not disappoint you. He will also help you.

But, my friends, Jesus is preeminently the Savior, the Helper in all spiritual need. He is, above all, the Helper, the Savior from sin and condemnation. For that very reason the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came into this world and became man. He suffered and died the accursed death on the cross upon Calvary that by His suffering and death He might redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

If Christ were only a savior from bodily and temporal need, such as most people care only to have, it would not have been neces-



sary for Him to suffer and die on the cross, yea, not even to become man. But in order to be the Savior from sin and condemnation He had to become man and undergo great suffering and death on the cross. By His bitter sufferings and death He saved the world from sin and condemnation.

We are all sinners, lost and condemned sinners, by nature. Not one of us can save himself. All our good works avail nothing. No one can be saved by his works, because they are imperfect and, therefore, not meritorious before God. We all need a Savior that is able to save us from sin and its wages. There is such a Savior. But there is only one such Savior. This one Savior is Jesus Christ. He is the one and only Savior that *all* people need. Whosoever does not accept Him as his only Savior cannot be eternally saved, for there is salvation in none other than in Christ Jesus. We accept Jesus as our Savior by true faith, and through faith in Him alone we are eternally saved.

My dear friend, how is it with you? You know that you are a sinner, a great sinner, in God's sight, because you have so often transgressed His commandments in thought, word, and deed. That you are a great sinner your own conscience tells you. You also know that you cannot save yourself, and yet you would like to be eternally saved. Would you not?

Oh, go to the one and only Savior, to Jesus, the one and true Savior of mankind! Trust in Him. Rely upon His work done for you. Cling to Him by true faith, and then you have a Savior that is able to save you.

No one that goes to Jesus will be disappointed. Jesus will save him, for He says: "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

In all our bodily and spiritual need let us go to Jesus. We will then have the Savior that is willing and able to save, yea, believe it, the Savior that we need in life and in death, in time and in eternity. This is most certainly true! Amen.

J. H. H.

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## Outlines for Lenten Sermons.

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### 1.

MATT. 26, 36—46.

The great passion of our Lord opens with a night scene, full of awe, hideous in aspect, painful to contemplate. There were no human witnesses. The three drowsy companions of the Lord were physically present, but in every other respect as far removed from the scene of this suffering as the plotting priests and faithless Judas were at that

hour. Only the all-seeing Jehovah beheld this mysterious struggle, and the ministering angel, Luke 22, 43, caught glimpses of it and pondered, in amazement, the sufferings of Christ, 1 Pet. 1, 11. 12. No admiring companions wrote the account of this scene in order to exhibit the glory of their friend's martyrdom. Christ had studiously sought out a secluded spot and a dark hour for this fearful trial. With holy reserve He concealed the glory of this struggle from men's gaze, not seeking reputation, disdaining acclaim, His heart fixed with singleness of purpose on the obedient execution of His merciful mission. But an inspired account has been given us of what transpired in the dark shadows of the olive-trees at Gethsemane between midnight and cock-crow of that day on which our Savior died. Now that all is finished, God invites all men to come and see how His Son wrought out the great salvation. — We study the solemn meaning of

THE AGONY OF OUR LORD AT GETHSEMANE, observing

1. *What He suffered.*

a. A mysterious anguish seizes Christ as soon as He has quit His disciples. It seems to have come upon Him with the shock of a horrible surprise, for Mark opens the account with the remark: "He was sore amazed." Sensations began to roll in upon His mind so dire, gloomy, terrible that He was frightened and began to moan like a person in great affliction, and to tremble like one whom great fear has seized. A crushing burden of woe had fallen upon Him, and He looked about for a helper or for relief, but finding none, He began to be very heavy, like a person who sees every hope vanish from him and feels the darkness of despair settle upon him. Utterly lonely and forsaken, — that is what this second expression in v. 37 really signifies. — When this fearful trial began, Peter, John, and James were still with the Lord. Presently He bids them tarry where they are, and proceeds some distance from them, greatly agitated, the strange fears and griefs constantly increasing; for He tells them that His soul is "exceeding sorrowful," literally, surrounded with grief. Thoughts of death are suggested to Him; yea, the anguish which He is experiencing may cause His dissolution, and He is struggling with these awful sensations like a man who is gradually sinking in quicksand. He walks back to His disciples, and leaves them again, returns to His lonely wrestling place, and then comes back once more only to hurry a third time into solitude. These actions bespeak the disturbed state of His mind, His fearful excitement, causing Him now to seek, now to shun companionship. There is no record of any similar occurrence in the life of the Lord. This is something singularly strange and strangely singular. The holy writers have heaped their terms in describing the state of Christ at this hour, endeavoring to lead us to some perception of the unspeakable woe which weighted an immaculate soul in that dreadful hour.



b. During the progress of the agony, we see Christ prostrate in prayer before God. And what a prayer has the burden of this night wrung from His heart! It is a pitiful, a heart-rending cry of distress. A cup has been pressed to His lips at which He shudders, which He recoils with horror from drinking. He pleads with the Father to spare Him this task, if spared He can be. Such language was never heard from Him. We peer into an abyss of helplessness which makes us dizzy. We cannot understand why such a man who had come on such a mission should offer such a prayer thrice and be thrice denied. Into this depth of humiliation no mortal understanding descends.

c. It appears that the first spasm of grief lasted a whole hour, v. 40; likely the other two were of equal length, only growing in intensity, so that the strange phenomenon of the bloody sweat appeared, Luke 22, 44. The fiery ordeal through which He was passing was so hot, the load which He supported was so crushing, that it forced the blood from His veins through His pores. And at the end of the agony we observe Him exhausted, faint unto death, a wan, haggard man, in need of support. An angel now comes to minister to Him, and the Lord of hosts becomes a patient of His creature, and receives comfort from His inferior.

d. This agony at Gethsemane was foretold, Ps. 18, 4 ff.; 22, 2. 6. 12 ff.; 40, 12 f.; 69, 1. 2. 14 ff. This language of the old prophets must have sounded strange, but it is not stranger than what the evangelists have recorded as actual facts. — We naturally inquire

### 2. *Why He suffered.*

a. It is impossible to think of death without linking sin with it. Christ's heaviness of spirit and His apprehension of death, too, were coupled with reflections upon sin, Ps. 40, 12; 69, 5, namely, that sin which He assumed, John 1, 29; 2 Cor. 5, 21; Ps. 69, 4.

b. Christ turns to the Father in His distress, and speaks as if His present ordeal is arranged by the Father, Rom. 8, 32; John 12, 27. 31; Ps. 69, 7.

c. The eternal Judge sitting in judgment upon a culprit who is the world's proxy, and exacting stern justice, mitigating no single verdict, allowing His avenging righteousness to inflict the very last and direst punishment, hell and damnation, — that is the explanation of this agony of our Lord in Gethsemane, Is. 53, 6. 8; Rev. 19, 15. — This being the cause and the meaning of the distress of the Lord at Gethsemane, we cannot quit the study of this scene before having learned

### 3. *How He suffered.*

a. There are distinctly human features in this agony in the garden. Such things as man can suffer and must suffer on account of his rebellion and apostasy, Christ did suffer really and truly. Our

Redeemer was a true man, our flesh and blood, and the Judge dealt with Him as a man.

b. But there are also distinctly divine features in this agony. The sensation of God's anger, the Law, the effects of sin work nothing but wrath in a mere man, and lead to blasphemous defiance of God. But Christ, while pleading with God like a true man for relief in His keen anguish, also places His case with superhuman devotion into God's hand, and declares His unflinching obedience to the divine purpose which had brought Him to that hour. "Thy will be done!" — consider what that meant in those moments, Ps. 49, 7. 8. In this agitated person, who seems on the brink of despair, there is a strength which is not man's, which makes Him sufficient for this appalling task. This trembling, horror-stricken man is also the almighty God. We have a Redeemer that could do both, suffer and conquer in suffering. What He accomplished in Gethsemane is a full atonement of the guilt and a reparation of the loss incurred in Eden.

## 2.

MATT. 26, 47—56.

"The Mount of Olives" appears to have been a customary tarrying place for the Lord's company when at Jerusalem, which happened at least every Passover, Luke 22, 39. This serves to explain Judas's scheme, John 18, 2. The startling revelation which Christ had made at the Supper, John 13, 21 ff., had served two ends: it showed to Judas that the Master was not being deceived and meant to administer a last warning to the son of perdition; and it shows, in connection with His subsequent acts, that Christ went to His capture consciously and determinedly, John 13, 36. (Comp. ch. 11, 8. 16.) Matt. 26, 45. 46. Bearing these facts in mind, we take up the study of

### THE CAPTURE OF CHRIST.

#### 1. *The conduct of the captors.*

a. The last remarks of Christ to His sleepy companions were interrupted by a confused noise near the gate of the garden. "A multitude," a motley rabble from all ranks and stations in life, was seeking entrance; not only the denizens of the slums, but also very respectable people, in a worldly sense, were there, Luke 22, 52; John 18, 3. The regular temple-guard, perhaps reinforced by a squad of Roman soldiers, had been dispatched at the dead of night to apprehend a dangerous character. The secret proceedings mentioned John 11, 47 ff. were now being carried into effect. The Jewish council had hit upon a bold scheme: sending out an armed expedition at such an unusual hour bespoke business of a very serious nature, and was calculated to impress the simple with the council's zeal for the spiritual and secular welfare of the people. They relied on their cunning for the further success of the scheme; for the present they were satisfied if they succeeded in stirring up a popular excitement and filling minds with grave apprehensions of a crime.

b. Out of the crowd there presently steps the saintly hypocrite, the devil's mercenary, Judas, motions to his company, and bids them mark and take the man whom he kisses; and then he greets his



Master in the accustomed way and kisses Him. With an affectionate caress this piece of villainy is commenced. A cause the champions of which consent to work with such tools is judged in advance. All this is diabolical perfidy and blasphemy. This is the hour of darkness. And oh, how has Satan vitiated this whilom instrument of grace, this erstwhile professing disciple! We turn with grief and shuddering from this disgusting spectacle and attend to

2. *The conduct of the Captive.*

a. The Lord had anticipated the traitor, v. 46. Fresh from His heart-rending struggle before His Father's face, He rises ready and willing to meet His earthly doom. "Thy will be done!"

b. If the captors had meant to make a show of their prowess, they failed sorrowfully. In a moonlit night they had come out with lanterns and torches to find a man whom they knew well enough. Armed with swords and staves they go out to apprehend an innocent rabbi who was never known to harm any one. These preparations evidence their fear and silliness, and also their guilty conscience. When they are upbraided by the fettered Jesus, they make no answer. With the shackles on His wrists this prisoner charges His judges. Victorious faith of innocence!—"Thy will be done!"

c. But they would not have been able at all to secure Him, had not He permitted them. They had come to take Him, however, quite diffident as to their success; now He comes out to them *to be taken*, and their recognition of Him paralyzes them, John 18, 4 ff. The will of men could not prevail against this lordly prisoner, if He did not bow to a higher will.

d. The prostration of the captors had really made Judas's treacherous act unnecessary. Still the Lord suffered His holy countenance to be disgraced by this vile kiss, bowing meekly also to this shameful experience. And with no sign of resentment, no trace of anger, He addresses that sad question to His lost disciple. He has only sorrow, deep, heartfelt sorrow, for His traitor. Here is matchless love and unparalleled mercy! With a bleeding heart He yields to His captors.—"Thy will be done!"

3. *The conduct of the Captive's friends.*

a. Roused from their stupor, ill prepared to be intelligent witnesses of what they were to see, they follow their Master. Failure to watch and pray, to keep under the unwilling flesh, was destined, as usual, to lead to fatal consequences. Drowsy, indifferent servants are part of the Lord's affliction.

b. When the real aim of the multitude is manifest to them, their passion is roused, and they meet violence with violence, thus disgracing the holiest cause on earth with their blundering stupidity, and forcing the kind Lord to repair by a fresh act of grace the cruel damage they have done.—Hot-headed zealots, fanatics still mar the peaceful work of the Lord among men.

c. From reckless aggressiveness they lapse into the opposite extreme of craven fear, v. 56 b. All their vaunted courage is gone; Peter is running with the rest. Such is the fickleness of the heart even in disciples. How soon are the most fervent vows of loyalty and fealty forgotten!

## 3.

MATT. 26, 57—68.

From Gethsemane Christ was hurried before His judges. His enemies did not scruple about their undue haste in so important a matter. — The Church having taken the initiative in this matter He was first arraigned in the spiritual court; first, in a private way, without warrant, before the ex-high-priest Annas, John 18, 13 ff., then before the acting high-priest of that year, Caiaphas, and such members of the council as had gathered at that early hour, Matt. 26, 57 ff., and finally, before the plenary council soon after daybreak, Luke 23, 66. These proceedings yield the shocking result:

## CHRIST SENTENCED TO DEATH BY THE CHURCH.

1. *The charge.*

a. Christ had declared to His captors that they could have no manifest cause for laying hands on Him, Luke 22, 52. 53. Annas brought no charge against Him, but tried to wrest from Him some statement which might incriminate Christ, John 18, 19 ff. Caiaphas and his associates did not begin their trial of Christ with a due statement of their charge against Him, but went about fabricating a charge after they had made Christ prisoner.

b. The law of Moses contained explicit directions regarding the taking of testimony, Deut. 19, 15 ff. These directions were so flagrantly disregarded at this trial that Jesus did not feel called upon to defend Himself. The testimony brought against Him was garbled, distorted, and contradictory. He had never said a word about wanting to destroy the temple of God; cf. John 2, 19. After a series of tedious efforts the prosecution was still without a true bill of indictment against the prisoner.

c. Now the high-priest cuts the proceedings short. Rising in his official dignity and with grand pathos he adjures Christ, etc., v. 63. The proceeding was utterly irregular; but we have here the charge on which it was intended from the outset to try Christ, viz., on the charge of blasphemy, because He had declared Himself to be the incarnate Son of God, the promised Redeemer of Israel and the world.

2. *The trial.*

a. The implied charge of Caiaphas laid bare the extent of the obdurate blindness which had seized the leaders of the Jewish Church. It must now be investigated. For such a charge witnesses were not needed: the whole land of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, Phenicia, and Syria had heard, and many had believed, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and the Messiah. Christ called for no witnesses of what He never intended to deny. He promptly and solemnly affirmed the high-priest's question. — What all infidels and false Christians in all ages have denied, His divinity and His Redemptorship, that He has attested before the representatives of the Church in His last hour. On this claim He has made His stand. Upon His divinity and His atonement He is still ready to stand trial.

b. It appears from Luke (22, 67—70) that Christ did not merely affirm, but went on to corroborate what He affirmed. He asked His judges questions; no doubt He cited the evidence of His three years



of activity among them, His correct teaching in full harmony with the Scriptures and marvelously comporting with the ancient prophecies; the majestic authority of His utterances; His astonishing miracles; the witness of the Spirit in the hearts of His hearers. His judges made no answer, Luke 22, 68. Instead of trying Him honestly on the charge they had raised, they were being tried by Him for having raised that charge. The tables were completely turned on them. Instead of condemning Him on this charge, they should have set up a shout of joy at having found the Messiah of Israel. That was the only alternative since they had not proved Him an impostor and blasphemer. He had accepted the high-priest's challenge, and having fairly met it, what must the verdict be?

### 3. *The verdict.*

a. v. 65. An act expressive of intense indignation and the direct charge of blasphemy was the answer Christ received. The charge remained still as much unproved as when it was first raised, nevertheless this haughty priest essays to declare officially, with an air of infallibility, that the prisoner is guilty, and that he considers it needless to hear further testimony.

b. v. 66. The high-priest's associates become his accomplices in crime. This verdict was a foregone conclusion, just as the charge was trumped up, the witnesses suborned, the investigation criminally faulty. The entire proceedings are a legal buffoonery, a parody on justice.

c. But the verdict is no jest, v. 67. 68. The sentenced Christ is forthwith treated as an outcast and an apostate.

The charge against our Lord at this church trial is still the glory and the comfort of the Christian's faith. The conduct of our Lord during this trial inspires us to confess Him, in the teeth of all opposing factions, the Son of God and the Savior of all men. What others have spurned and still spurn Him for is the very heart of our faith in Him.

## 4.

MATT. 27, 1. 2. 11—26.

Upon the events here recorded rests the solemn statement in our Creed: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead." The power of the State, ordained for the protection of the innocent, was prostituted to minister to manifest injustice at this infamous trial of Jesus. The Church had rejected the Messiah and had denied to the Son of God the honor due Him; the State scorned the Son of Man and turned its authority against a loyal citizen. Everywhere nothing but corruption! All ranks, all estates of men cooperate in the endeavor to encompass the death of Jesus. He is become "the rejected of men." The trial before Pilate was intended to serve as a legal cover of the Jews' iniquitous design. It resulted only in drawing the Gentile world into the guilt of the chosen people.

### CHRIST SENTENCED TO DEATH BY THE STATE.

#### 1. *The charge.*

a. When the Jewish Church Council met early in the morning, only this was clear to them that they must put Jesus to death. But

how to accomplish this end was what vexed them. A charge on which their prisoner could be convicted and sentenced was still wanting. They relied on the excitement which would be caused by the unusual spectacle of their body marching in solemn procession at the dawn of day with a bound prisoner to the governor's house, and their first answer to the governor's question, John 18, 30, was a bold bluff.

b. But a charge must be preferred, and so vv. 11. 12. Luke (23, 2. 5) and John (19, 7) have related how the charge against Jesus was shifted, and how the accusers finally resorted to open intimidation, John 19, 12.

c. All evangelists unite in recording the impression which these charges made on the governor. Barring one reply to a question of Pilate which required a testimony on the part of Jesus, the Lord treated all charges with utter contempt. His silence proved such a majestic evidence of His innocence that the Roman judge quailed before it.

## 2. *The trial.*

a. And yet this judge received the case, was deferential enough to come out to the accusers, John 18, 29, dallied, trifled, procrastinated, sought to shift responsibility, in fact, did everything except the one thing which as judge he was called upon to do: fairly try the prisoner and pronounce his sentence.

b. There was much to urge Pilate to take a stand in behalf of Jesus: the impression of His innocence which he had received, his knowledge of the Jews' motive, Matt. 27, 18, the urgent message of his wife, the finding of Herod, Luke 23, 15. In spite of all he resorted to a ruse: he determined to appeal to the pity of Jesus' accusers, John 19, 1—5. 13—15; Matt. 27, 17 ff. — By every standard of justice this trial stands condemned as a profanation. It reveals the spirit of the world toward the Christian religion. The Christian must expect from the powers that be anything rather than a fair trial and justice.

## 3. *The sentence.*

a. The scene indicated in vv. 24—27 is extremely shocking: the judge avowing his innocence and at the same time formally sentencing an innocent person to death, the people imprecating upon themselves and their posterity the eternal vengeance only in order to destroy Jesus. Amidst a tumultuous uproar, before an enraged populace, insane with unreasonable hatred, the Redeemer received His sentence. He seemed to look into the face of hell's legions that had been let loose against Him in this hour.

b. Silently He received His doom. In all these events His own predictions were being fulfilled. He wanted to die. "Thy will be done!" — that sentiment uttered during the agony in the garden still supported Him in His suffering. — His sentence is our release.

(NB. The remaining texts in this series are Matt. 27, 27—38: The Crucifixion; 27, 39—49: The Crucified Lord; 27, 50—61: The Death of Jesus.)

## ERRATUM.

On p. 28, last issue, fifth line from bottom, read *Is.* for *Ps.*